

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny

Exemption(s): _____

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full☐ Classify as ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to HUMAN RIGHTS: ARGENTINA

Date _____ Declassify on _____ Reason _____

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① PF 9/29/78
② Argentina
P AR 211

Political terrorism of the left and the right has wracked Argentina since the late sixties and was partially responsible for the economic and political breakdown precipitating the March 1976 coup. The Junta's efforts to eliminate leftist terrorism led to a massive counter-terrorist campaign, undertaken by the security forces.

Although the Government has publicly stated that terrorism has largely been defeated, the anti-terrorist campaign of the last few years has continued and has resulted in severe violations of human rights.

At present, the Government of Argentina acknowledges approximately 3,300 state of siege prisoners detained under executive power (PEN). The state of siege powers, invoked in 1974, have been used to hold a wide variety of persons for long periods without formal charges. There are reports of an additional 500 prisoners in military camps.

Arrests continue but have decreased considerably from the level of the past two years. From January to August, 1978, 347 were added to PEN and 446 released.

Security personnel and prison officials routinely use torture during the interrogation process to intimidate and extract information. The Embassy reports that practices include "electric shock, the submarine (prolonged submersion under water), sodium pentothal, and severe beatings."

In addition, thousands (estimates range between 3,000 and 20,000) have been abducted by security forces. These cases, known as the disappeared, include not only suspected terrorists but also a broad range of people, such as labor leaders, workers, clergymen, human rights advocates, scientists, and doctors. A movement led by human rights organizations and the Mothers of the disappeared, with the support of some elements of the Church, is trying to trace the missing people and to mobilize popular support for this effort through newspaper advertisements. The Government has not accounted for the vast majority of the disappeared, many of whom are presumed to be dead. At present, our Embassy is receiving reports of disappearances at a rate of 16-45 per month. There are an increasing number of reports that the military has recently restricted the authority of Corps Commanders to authorize abductions. However, the effect of these orders has yet to be verified.

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The GOA in late 1977 reinstituted a limited "right of option" for political prisoners, held under executive detention, to request exile. However, from January to August, only about 60 were allowed to leave under this program.

The GOA for the first time in February, 1978 published lists of those detained under the state of siege.

Once again, permission has been granted for the ICRC to visit non-military prisons.

Responsive action has been taken on a few cases in which the U.S. has expressed special interest. Newspaper editor Jacob Timerman was transferred from PEN detention to house arrest; Alfredo Bravo, Co-Chairman of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, was paroled; Guillermo Vogler was released to the U.S. under the right of option and the Deutsch family was released. Also placed on parole was Perez Esquivel, leader of Paz y Justicia and Nobel Peace Prize nominee. Active negotiations are underway at a very high level between the Argentine Government and the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IAHRC) to arrange a visit by the Commission to Argentina.

Official harassment of selected religious groups continues. The Jehovah Witnesses have borne much of the brunt. Reports to anti-semitic incidents targeted at members of the Jewish community and Jewish prisoners have decreased.

Severe restrictions remain on civil and political freedoms, among these trade-union rights, fair judicial processes, and the activities of political parties. Press freedom continues to be curtailed although some restrictions were recently lifted. There appears to be little concerted or effective effort to date to check fundamental abuses or revitalize the legal and institutional barriers that would prevent human rights violations in the future.

ACTION TAKEN ON HUMAN RIGHTS

- On October 27, 1977, the U.S. voted "no" on a gas pipeline loan in the IDB. We followed this up with "no" votes on a cellulose plant on December 1 and a petrochemical complex on December 8. On November 3 we did, however, support an IDB loan for potable water on the grounds that it meets basic human needs.

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- Early in 1978, we abstained on an industrial credit and a grain storage loan, both in the World Bank. We abstained rather than vote no to signal to the Argentine Government that we had noted limited improvements in some areas, and to encourage further positive developments. We followed this by an extension of a \$60 million agricultural credit loan in April and abstained on three IFC loans.

Ex-Im Bank has recently agreed to issue letters of interest to two companies interested in projects in Argentina, but financing of projects worth over \$600 million is still being held back.

- Over 200 arms transfer requests are being deferred. Argentina rejected FMS credits for FY-78. The Administration declined to sign the FY'77 FMS agreement and is not requesting FMS credits for Argentina for FY-79. All arms transfers (FMS sales and commercial sales of items on the munitions list) are being reviewed on a case-by-case basis; only very few selected new items with no apparent relationship to human rights have been approved.
- On various occasions, we have discussed our human rights concerns with the GOA at the highest levels. Vice-President Mondale underscored these concerns in a meeting with President Videla in Rome at the time of the coronation of Pope John Paul I. Earlier representation includes trips by two Assistant Secretaries, an Under Secretary and the Secretary of State. When Under Secretary Newsom visited Argentina in late May, he made clear to the Argentines that we want better relations with that country, but that there would have to be improvements in the human rights area. He specifically asked for movement on: an invitation to the IAHRG; establishment of a mechanism to inform the families of disappeared persons of their whereabouts; and trial, release or exile for the 3,400 PEN prisoners held without charge.

The Department has submitted over 1,000 names of individuals who are either detained or have disappeared to the Argentine Government and have requested that they furnish information on these individuals.

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